

Shared Ground:
Understanding Individuals' Affects on the Creative Process

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Distinction Thesis for a BFA in Dance

TITLE: Shared Ground: Understanding Individuals' Affects on the Creative Process

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Background

I am a contemporary dancer, choreographer, and dance notator, and I have participated in many different movement-generative creative processes. Through my experiences, I have come to understand dance as a space for individuals to learn how to connect. In each new work I help facilitate, I witness dancers and choreographers investing their full bodies and minds in the work as they collaborate.

Across my efforts, I have learned that every body is home to an individually eclectic range of mental and physical skillsets. It is clear that no body can replicate movement without first fitting it to its personal range of expertise. Yet groups come to share in the collective task of learning a dance, and in our collaborative communication dancers learn how to use differences of body and mind to work together.

Hypothesis

I am interested in how individuals' body histories affect the creative process. I wondered whether two resulting works stemming from the same initial movement phrase would reflect my aesthetics, or the movement influences of the dancers.

Procedure

To conduct this research, I designed a creative process where dancers' individuality and my directorship equally designed the work. I proposed two groups of dancers learn a set piece of choreography generated from my body as impetus for movement creation. Then, in separate

weekly rehearsals, the groups would deepen their understanding of my movement as we built works for performance. Through their developments, I would use the Laban Systems of Movement Analysis to track how my movement changed to better fit the dancers' unique facilities. I hoped to test the final movement products to determine whether director or dancer aesthetics showed up most in the dance.

Methodology

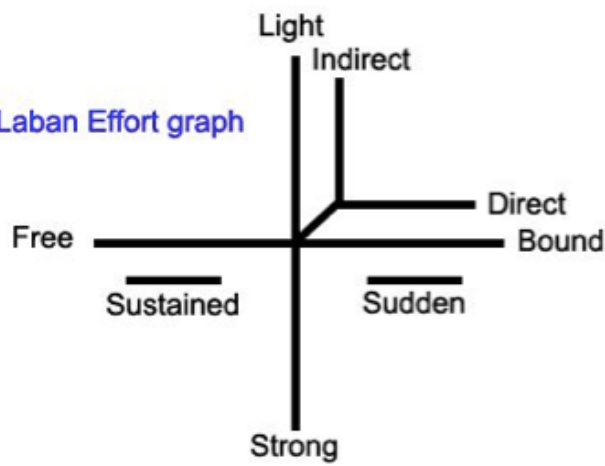
The Laban Systems of Movement Analysis are a symbolic language representative of body parts, spatial directions, and how the two exist together through time. These lenses through which I am able to read movement would help me determine dances' evolutions. Of the systems Labanotation, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), and Motif score writing, the latter two best served this project.

Motif score writing is a way to use the Laban Analysis symbols to lay out each movement in a phrase on paper. Symbols are written not to document the dance in its entirety, but to determine what the most essential quality of each movement is. For this process, I used Motif to frame how I watched for the specific ways in which dancers added or subtracted to the movement I gave them. How they shifted my original movement phrase to better suit their bodies, I was able to document through Motif score writing.

Laban Movement Analysis is a system that outlines movement efforts as categorized by direct or indirect space, strong or light weight, sudden or sustained timing, and bound or free flow. Expressed through the Laban Effort Graph, LMA works to pinpoint dancers' habitual affinities towards these qualities of motion. I used LMA as a communal lens through which dancers and I could analyze out efforts in the work. Proceeding each rehearsal, I conducted self-evaluations where dancers and I marked Laban Effort Graphs based off the efforts we felt most

aligned with. (A blank evaluation is shown below.) This task brought each group together under a community-building exercise, while allowing each individual to reflect for themselves on time spent together.

Laban Effort graph



The diagram is a Laban Effort graph. It features a central origin with four primary axes: a vertical axis pointing up labeled 'Light' and down labeled 'Strong'; a horizontal axis pointing left labeled 'Free' and right labeled 'Bound'; and a diagonal axis pointing up-right labeled 'Indirect' and down-right labeled 'Direct'. There are also two horizontal segments: one on the left labeled 'Sustained' and one on the right labeled 'Sudden'.

1st 3 words/phrases/scribbles that come to mind..

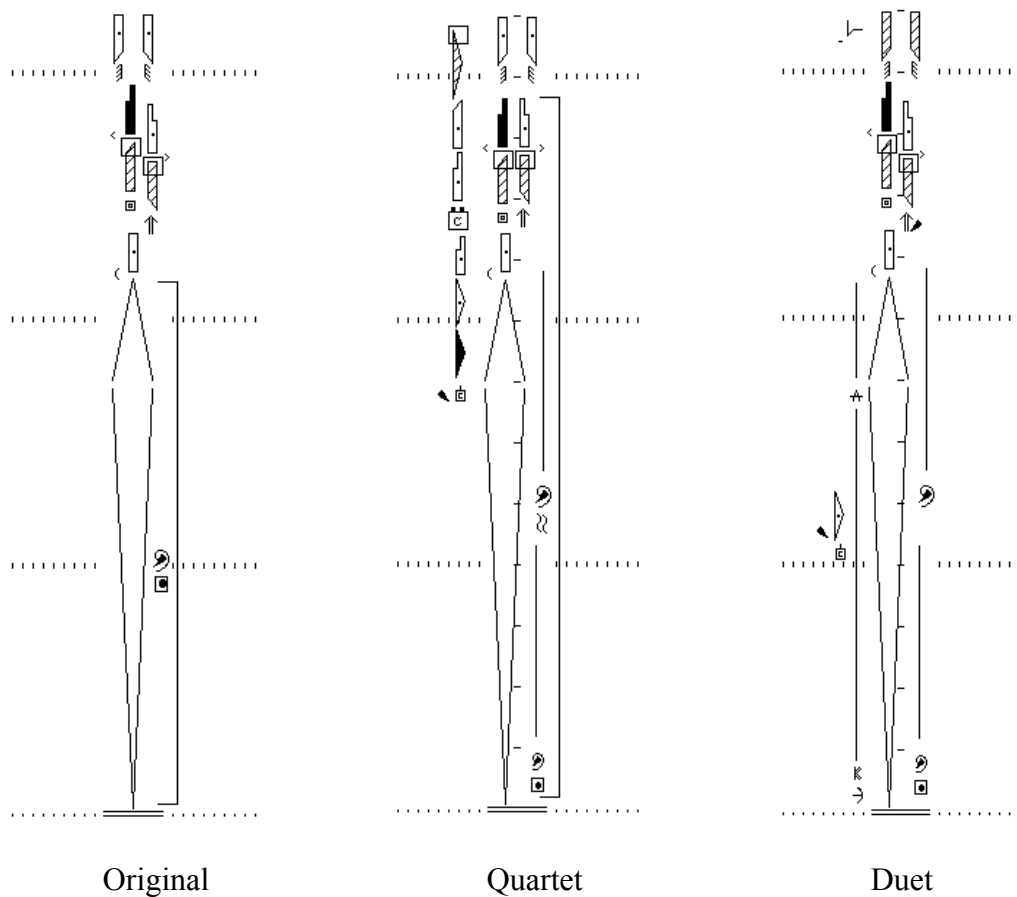
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Data/Evidence

Motif scores showed individual deviations and allowed dancers to visually track their influence on the movement. In between rehearsal times together, I learned how dancers' body preferences affected my movement. I looked back at score notes I took day-of, I watched video of the dancers executing the phrasework, and I acknowledged their individuality by editing the Motif scores to better reflect emerging quartet and duet dances. Through the scores' transparent evolutions, dancers fully understood their individually embodied ownership of my movement.

The way in which dancers took on the repetitive, side-to-side bounce that began my original phrase provides a clear example of how phrasework developed alongside individuals. (An excerpt from the original score, and developments, may be seen below.) The original score reads phrasework with an even pulse, light tone with weighted impact, and freedom in breath. The quartet dancers matched the even pulse, emphasized the weighted impact, and picked out a forwards lurching in the esophagus I had not seen before. Their edited score showcases the

nuanced timing, clarity in facial direction, and weighted esophagi that now exists in the movement. Upon introducing the same even, light and free, weighted and impactful bounce to the duet's process, dancers caught on to different attributes. Their resulting score shows an accentuation of fold in the spine and integration of strong weight that dancers emphasized from my movement. (Full process Motif scores are attached at the end.)



My choreographic aesthetics shaped both dances through the latter half of each creative process. With dancers' fully realized interpretations of my original phrase, I designed movement and space so dancers could explore the group dynamics we had established in the studio. As a

movement maker I look to create fully realized use of space, engagement of the viscera in imagery-driven physicality, something chaotic, something very clear, and texture.

The quartet attended to my aesthetic for fully used, textured space. Dancers in this work traversed spatial patterns in which individuals negotiated pathways of unison phrasework. Their movement tone ranged from a thick, viscous texture, to a thinner, airy quality. The duet existed between something chaotic, and something very clear. Dancers in this work explored their relationship through bound collisions and the arid aftermath. The two together shaped the space through push and pull negotiations of their varying movement affinities.

In the final stage of each process, dancers and I clarified intentionality through a series of rehearsal exercises. Each exercise aimed to heighten understanding of what was shared and what remained unique in our experience of the work. To name a few: We improvised individually as I asked dancers to consider the real and imagined forces acting upon their bodies. We drew scribbles to show others our understanding of spatial pathways. We used color to express on paper the imagery we experienced while we danced. We discussed relationships emerging within the work. We continued to fill out our self-evaluations. We came up with analogies that best triggered dancers' imaginations inside my choreographic intentions.

This layer of coaching inside the creative process added depth to dancers' physicality. Through experimenting with these many ways of detailing how dancers executed movement, the duet and quartet invited their imaginations and mental skillsets to my compositions.

Significance to the Research

My unique style of coaching brought the process's value of individuality through clear directorship to the forefront of movement execution. My intention to learn from dancers' body histories as they learned from mine, and my attention to maintaining that transparency

throughout the work, showed up in the overall composition. What resulted were two dances reflective of the creative processes that built them. Both my choreographic preferences and dancers' movement influences were visible in the final pieces of choreography. Quartet and duet compositions unmistakably showcased my aesthetic as it was interpreted by dancers who had maintained individual agency inside the work.

From this project, I am taking away a new understanding of the integral role coaching plays in the movement-generative creative process. As a director I may design the movement and the space, but it is ultimately how the dancers inside execute their mental and physical intentions towards the work that makes the dance. I thought dances produced would reflect my choreographic aesthetic or the dancers' individual body histories. Instead, how my dances were danced allowed my design and dancers' movement nuances to remain present in the work's performance. Now understanding dances as reflections of the choreographic processes that built them, I through this project gained a clear structure for movement-making alongside individuals.

Next Steps

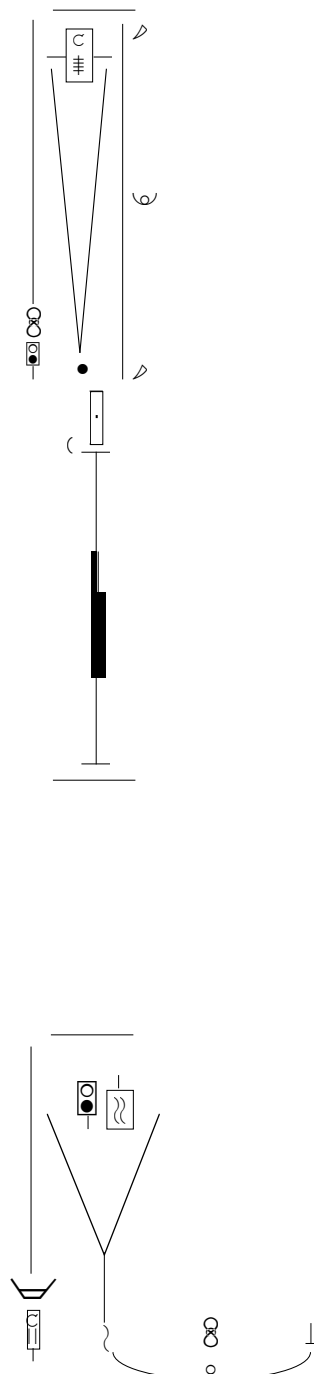
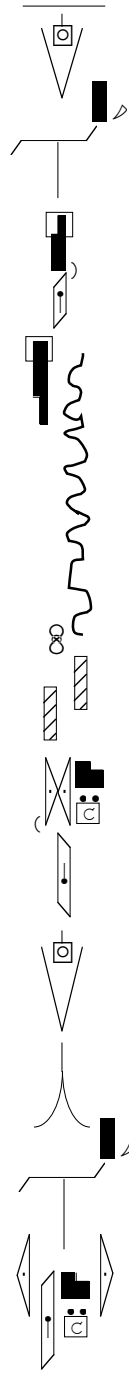
This process put my body at the heart of the work, and through my procedure I began to construct a solo to acknowledge my movement as the shared ground for the dancers. I believed the solo would showcase my full-bodied experience as a dancer, choreographer, and movement analyst. However, through movement construction my experience as director, and specifically not as dancer, revealed itself. The choreography came to reflect the barren landscape I felt from traces left behind by the dancers.

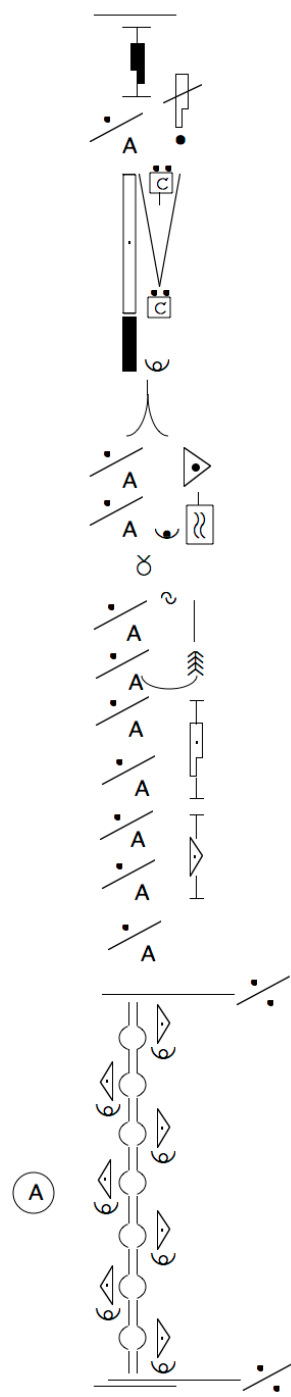
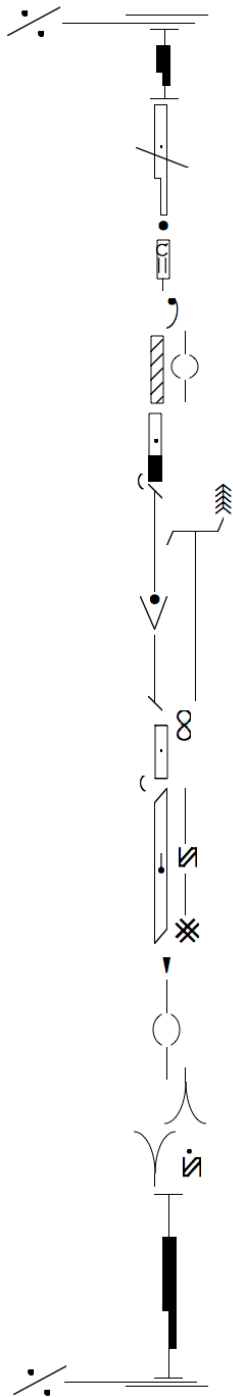
There is more to glean from embodied exploration of my own movement development throughout this process. My body remains as the physical container for all learned experiences throughout this work. To further my research in individuality's affect on the creative process, I

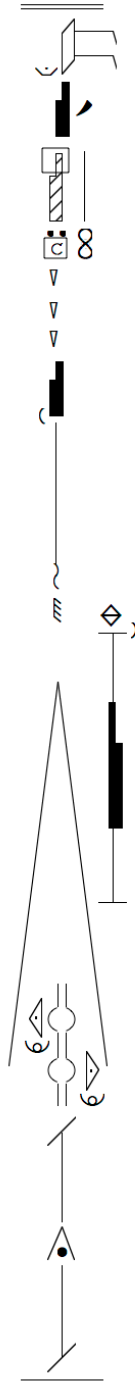
will investigate how the relationships I built through this project have affected my own body history.

The Quartet

Motif scores are read bottom to top

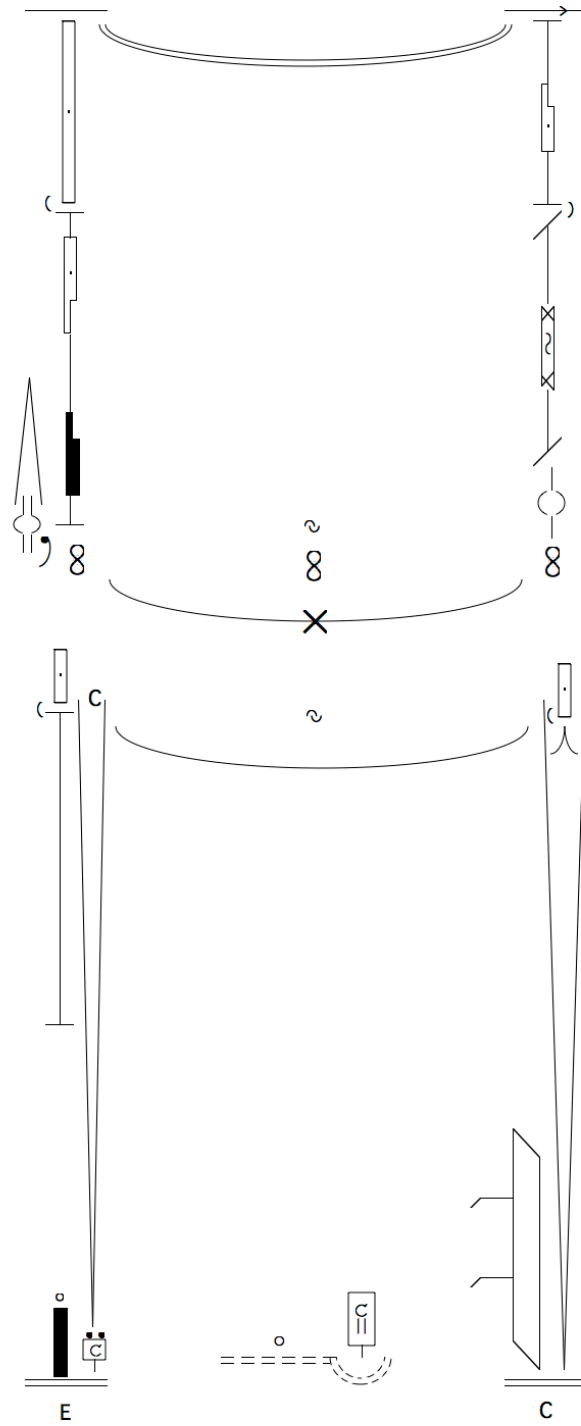


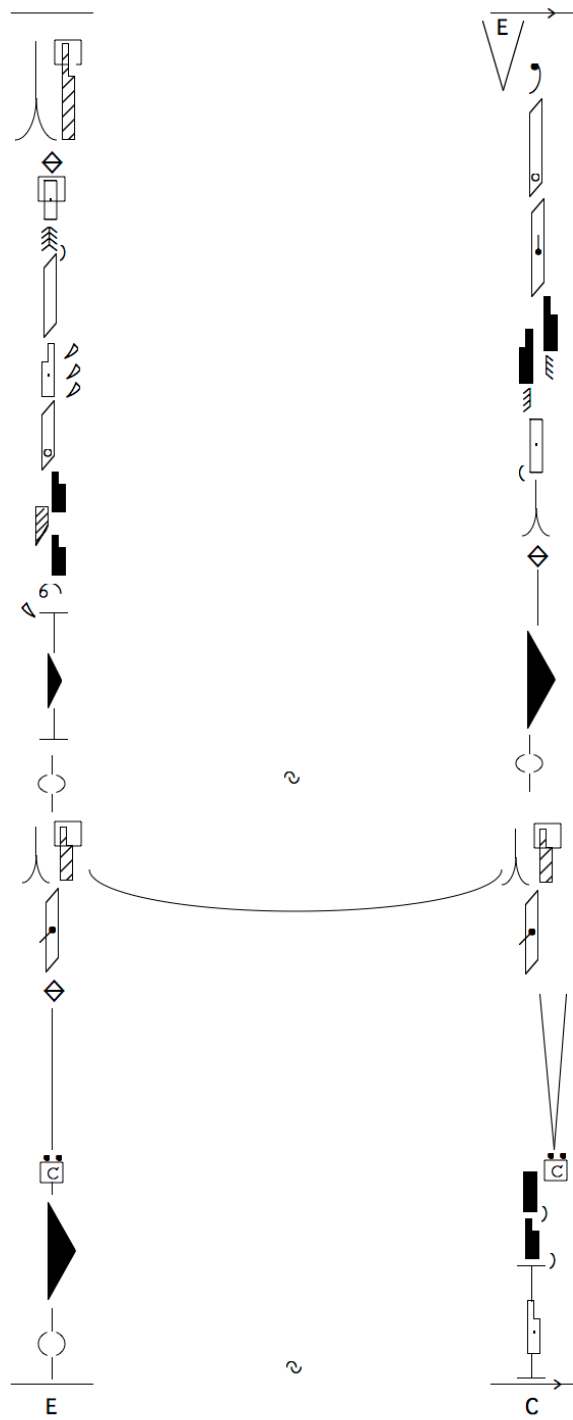


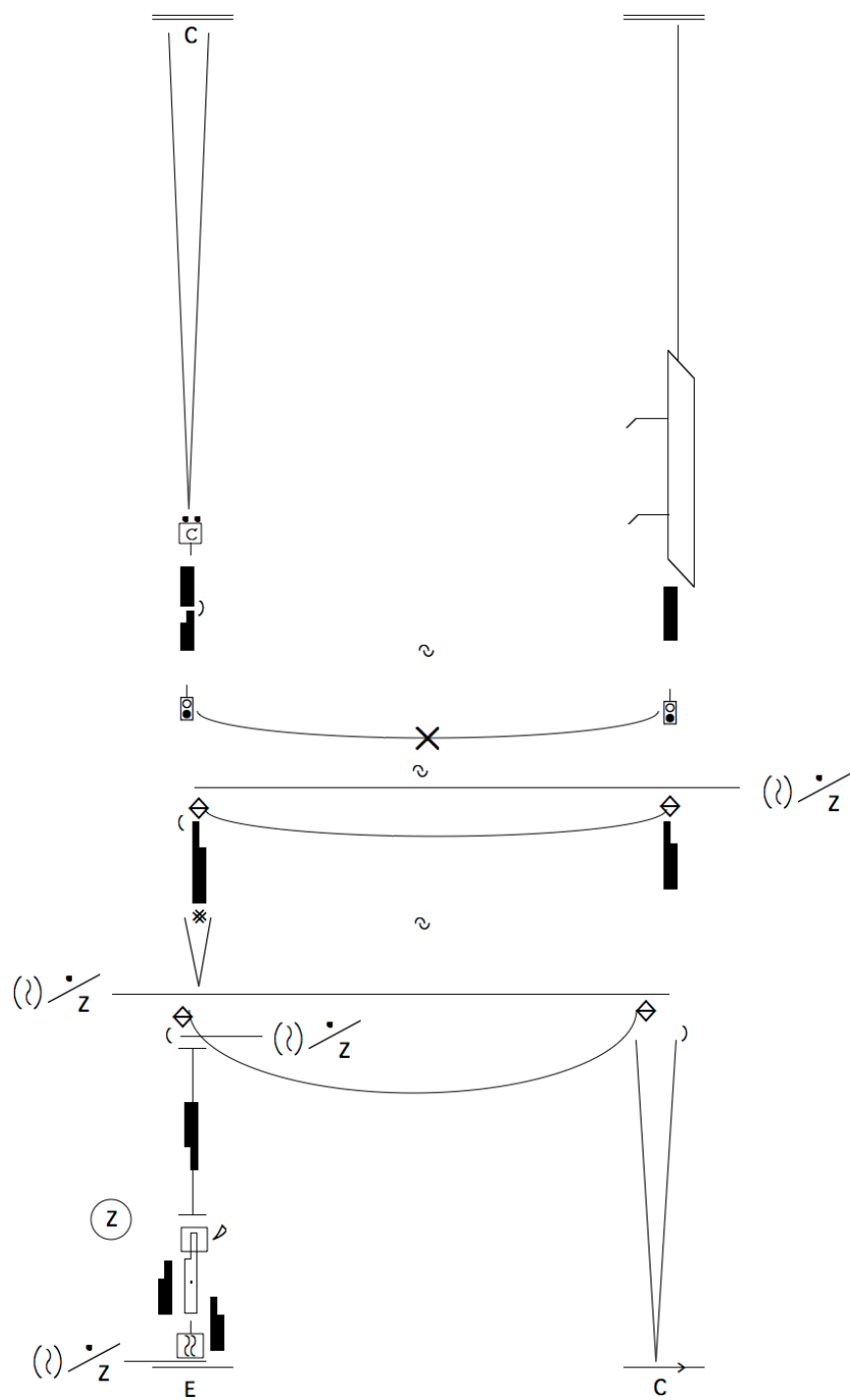


The Duet

right and left staves represent each dancer

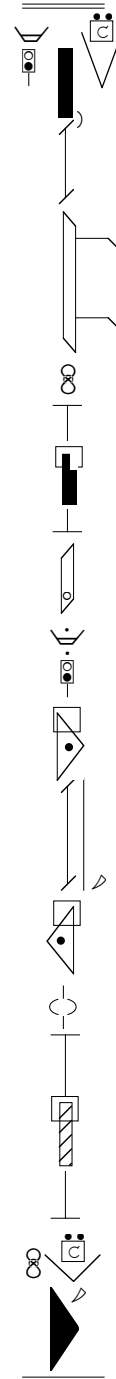
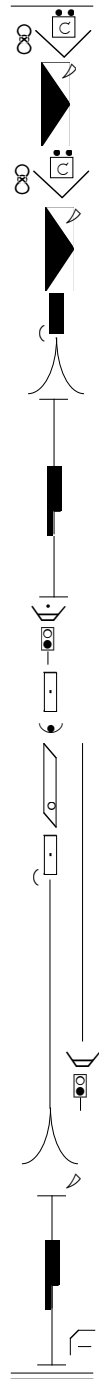






The Solo

Motif scores are read left to right



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